OCTOBER, 1916 EXTENSION CIRCULAR, No. 28

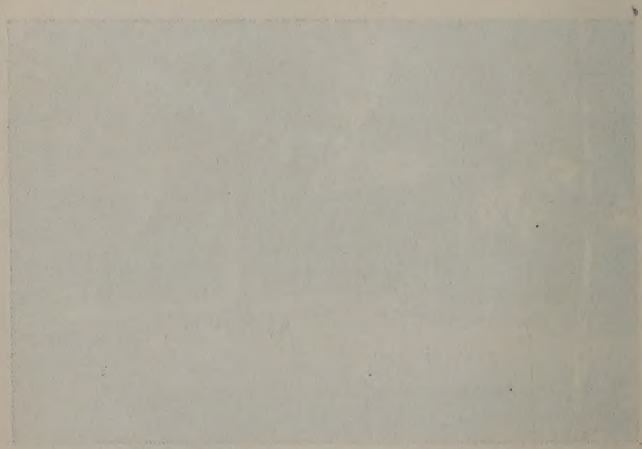
N. C. College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts
N. C. State Department of Agriculture
N. C. Agricultural Experiment Station, and
United States Department of Agriculture, cooperating

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
B. W. KILGORE, Director

HOW TO SECURE BETTER LAWNS IN NORTH CAROLINA

A good lawn adds greatly to the attractiveness of the home.

Raleigh and West Raleigh, North Carolina



HOW TO SECURE BETTER LAWNS IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Nothing adds more to the beauty and attractiveness of an urban or rural home than a well-set and properly kept lawn. In far too many cases our people have neglected or exerted too feeble efforts in this direction, probably under the assumption in many cases that grasses are not available for making lawns in this section of the country, where the sun shines so brightly during the months of June, July, August and September. This idea has probably arisen from the fact that blue grass, which is used so successfully in some of the Northern States and in other regions of the country having a much cooler climate than prevails in most of North Carolina, with the exception of the upper Piedmont and Mountain sections, has not generally been found to survive very well the heat of the direct bright sunlight.

In the Coastal Plain and also in much of the Lower Piedmont Plateau Regions blue grass alone cannot be depended upon during a normal season as a lawn grass, especially if the lawn is not protected somewhat from direct sunlight by shade. No amount of care in the preparation and in the fertilization of the soil in these two regions of the State may ordinarily be expected to result in securing a satisfactory lawn from a seeding of blue grass alone.

On the other hand, on the retentive soils of the Mountain and Upper Piedmont Regions, blue grass is ordinarily as satisfactory a grass as may be used for lawn-making. Here the sunlight is not excessively intense during the day, the nights are usually cool, and if proper attention is given in preparing the soil and in the care of the grass after seeding, success may be expected to follow its use under normal seasonal conditions. It will be well to bear in mind, however, that although this grass cannot be depended upon when used alone for seeding lawns throughout most of the areas of North Carolina, it will be well to include it in many of the grass mixtures, especially for those designated for the Piedmont and Mountain Regions.

GRASSES TO BE CHIEFLY RELIED ON.

The grasses selected for seeding the lawn in any section should be those that not only grow well in the soils and under the climatic condition of that particular locality, but should be those which have fine, narrow leaves, short joints and which, when properly looked after, make a compact, velvety green turf throughout the year. Secondary consideration should also be given to the selection of grasses the shades of which will harmonize in the lawn mixture.

For the sandy and loamy soils of the Coastal Plain Region, Bermuda grass is probably as well or better suited for lawn-making than

any other of the grasses, especially of the fine-stemmed types. It has two serious defects, in that its leaves are browned by the first frost of fall, and that new leaves are rather late in making their appearance the following spring; so the dependence upon this grass alone for lawn-making results in having the lawn of rather an unattractive appearance during the season of frosty weather. This can be obviated, however, by mixing Texas blue grass with the Bermuda, as the former makes its best growth during the winter months. Another plan that has been used with fairly satisfactory results in some portions of the State where Bermuda was the only grass in the lawn was to thoroughly disk the lawn in the fall, after frost, and put in seed of some rapidly growing grass like Italian rye grass. In many portions of the Piedmont section Bermuda grass combined with blue grass and white clover, together or separately, will be found to give very good results for a few years. The Bermuda will grow during the summer, while the blue grass and white clover will do their best growth during the cool weather. The Bermuda will, to a large extent, in most instances, eventually replace the blue grass and clover.

Other grasses that may be depended upon for lawn-making when used under proper conditions are redtop, Rhode Island bent, creeping bent, and, to a less extent, the fescue grasses, rough-stalked meadow, sweet vernal, crested dogtail, and wood meadow grasses.

PREPARATION FOR THE LAWN.

As the lawn is to be permanent, great care should be taken to have the land properly graded and thoroughly prepared before attempting to seed. The trees and shrubbery should be grouped, if possible. The seed-bed should be fine, mellow and fairly well stocked with humus, but should not be loosened too deeply. The soil below the seed should be fairly firm, without being hard and compact. Such a seed-bed will offer the best conditions for germination of the seeds and for the development of the young plants after germination, as the moisture from below will then be available through the operations of capillary action, and the fine dirt-like surface soil will act as a blanket to retard evaporation from the surface of the soil. The fine soil on top will also admit of the young plants pushing through to the surface for air and sunshine without difficulty, while the firm surface soil will afford a suitable foothold for the roots. If the seed-bed is made too loose and deep, the best conditions for germination of the seed are not afforded, as the soil will dry out too quickly and the grasses will be more apt to freeze out during the cold weather of the winter. Cowpeas is one of the best crops to precede the final preparation of the land for the grasses. If the growth of the peas is not too heavy, they should be plowed or disked or dug into the soil after having been cut for four or five days, and the land then be allowed to stand several days before its final preparation and seeding.

PROPER FERTILIZATION.

It is especially important, if the soil is deficient in organic matter and a good growth of cowpeas or some other crop has not been turned into the soil, to add farm-yard manure or woods mold in liberal quantities uniformly over the lawn and thoroughly work it into the soil before sowing the seed. The manure should be well rotted and be free from grass and weed seed. The manure or woods mold should be used at the rate of about 20 tons per acre. Then, for the Coastal Plain section, at seeding use something like 600 to 1,000 pounds per acre of a mixture analyzing 6 to 8 per cent available phosphoric acid, 4 to 5 per cent nitrogen, and 2 to 3 per cent potash; and for the Piedmont and Mountain sections an equal amount of a fertilizer analyzing about 10 per cent available phosphoric acid, 4 to 5 per cent nitrogen, and 1½ to 2 per cent potash. The fertilizer, or manure, should go on after the land is broken and be thoroughly disked or harrowed into the soil before the seeding is made. It is especially important that the lawn be made smooth and level or partly sloping to the front and sides before the seed are sown.

SOWING THE SEED.

As the use of good, pure seed is of the highest importance, no point or expense should be spared to secure the best grade of seed. They should be equally divided and be sown two ways at right angles to each other, in order to be assured of a uniform distribution. Thoroughly harrow or rake the seed into the soil, being careful that they are covered uniformly, but not very deeply, for if put deep the germination will be poor and the stand unsatisfactory. The seed may be put in by hand or with some one of the common makes of hand seeders found on the market. In seeding, enough seed should be used to produce a good stand. There is no economy in using the seed too sparingly. In fact, one of the main causes of failure in lawn-making is the use of too small amount of seed. At least 45 to 50 pounds per acre should be sown.

BEST TIME TO PUT IN SEED.

In this State, outside of the mountains, the best results are usually secured by early fall seeding, and even in the mountains, especially at elevations of less than 2,500 feet, better results are frequently secured from early fall seeding than from seeding made during the spring. By seeding in the fall, the grass will generally become well established before winter, and in the spring will have a goodly start on weeds and undesirable grasses like crab grass, seed of which may be in the soil.

MIXTURES FOR COASTAL PLAIN SECTION.

In addition to the individual grasses given above for certain localities, we would suggest the following mixtures for the sandy soils of the Coastal Plain Region of the State:

No. 1—

Italian rye grass	40	pounds
White clover	5	"
Bermuda grass (root cuttings)	....	"
Seeding per acre	....	"

The Bermuda roots should be cut into about 4-inch lengths during the early fall or before growth begins in the spring, and be dropped about 6 to 8 inches apart in 8 to 10 inch shallow furrows. Cover well by harrowing, by plowing, or with the foot of a hoe, being sure to leave the lawn perfectly smooth. Then sow the rye grass in the quantity indicated above, and cover well with a harrow, rake or brush. This mixture is especially suitable for establishing a lawn quickly, the rye grass making a good showing during the first fall, winter and spring, and the Bermuda coming on during the summer. After the first year, the Bermuda and white clover will be the main dependence, the former mainly during the summer and early fall, and the latter during the winter and spring.

No. 2—

Texas blue grass (sets or root cuttings)	.....
Bermuda grass (root cuttings)	.....
Seeding per acre	.....

The Texas blue grass, like Bermuda grass, cannot be propagated very satisfactorily from seed. Usually, small pieces of the turf or roots are depended upon. These are put into the soil in the way indicated above for Bermuda grass.

No. 3—

Creeping bent	20	pounds
Crested dogtail	14	"
Rough-stalked meadow	12	"
White clover	4	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture is very well suited for seeding low, shaded areas that are fairly well drained.

No. 4—

Redtop	25	pounds
Rhode Island bent	20	"
White clover	5	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture should be well suited to most all sandy and sandy loam soils, especially those that are only moderately well drained. Where the conditions are such as to require much tramping on the lawn, creeping bent had probably best be substituted for the Rhode Island bent grass.

No. 5—

Redtop	30	pounds
Kentucky blue grass	20	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture will be found best adapted for the stiffer soils of the eastern part of the State that are fairly well shaded.

MIXTURES FOR PIEDMONT AND MOUNTAINOUS SECTIONS.

No. 1—

Redtop	10	pounds
Kentucky blue grass	20	"
Italian rye grass	20	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture is designed to give a fairly good lawn quickly in the Piedmont section, the rye grass doing its best during the first winter and spring, and the other grasses coming on later.

No. 2—

Kentucky blue grass	24	pounds
Redtop	20	"
White clover	6	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture is probably best suited to the conditions of the Lower Piedmont section of the State.

No. 4—

Kentucky blue grass	20	pounds
Redtop	10	"
Wood meadow grass	10	"
Various-leaved fescue	10	"
Seeding per acre	50	"

This mixture is particularly suited for shaded areas in the Piedmont and Mountain sections.

CARE OF THE LAWN.

The lawn mower should be started as soon in the spring as the grass is tall enough for the mower to catch the ends of the leaves well, and should then be run over the lawn every week during the growing season, but the clipping should not be too close ,as such would injure the grass. When managed in this way, the cut grass may and should lie

on the lawn and thereby add much to the soil. If the grasses be allowed to grow tall, they would have to be removed, which would be exhaustive on both the plants and the soil. It is therefore essential, in maintaining a good lawn, to never let the grasses go to seed.

During every winter or early in the spring give the lawn a liberal coating of well-rotted stable manure, free from grass and weed seeds, and supplement this with an application of 500 to 600 pounds per acre of a mixture of two parts of 16 per cent acid phosphate and one part of kainit, or its equivalent amount of potash from muriate of potash or other suitable material carrying potash. This latter application should go on when the grass leaves are free from rain or dew, and should be applied, if possible, just before a shower.

In the spring, after grasses have gotten well started into growth, if they do not have a good color and are not growing as well as is desired, it will usually be wise to make an application of nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia at the rate of 100 to 200 pounds per acre, just before a rain, being careful not to make the application when the plants are wet, as it might scorch the leaves. It will usually pay to make a broadcast application of ground limestone over the grass at the rate of one to two tons per acre, at intervals of four to five years, especially so for the grass mixtures recommended for the soils of the Piedmont and Mountain sections.

In sprinkling the lawn, it had better be done well once a week than every day in a superficial manner. The good wetting weekly would promote a much deeper root system than would the small daily sprinkling. However, for average conditions it will usually be best not to water at all, unless it is to be kept up in a systematic way. A good development of the roots of the grasses is essential to the best results.